

Opportunity to Comment on the Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation Environmental Assessment

The Ozark-St. Francis National Forests have prepared a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation, which includes a programmatic plan amendment to the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests' Plan. The plan amendment proposes to establish more targeted protective measures for threatened, endangered and sensitive (TE&S) bat species, including the Indiana bat, based on recent scientific data collection and monitoring. This would be accomplished in the plan amendment by updating management direction and removing or rewording plan standards. The Forests have initiated a 30-day review period on the Draft EA and forest plan amendment for public review and comment.

The analysis within the Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation EA and the associated programmatic plan amendment will result in two separate decisions, which consequently requires two separate but concurrent public comment periods. Comments on the Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation EA will be accepted for 30 days while comments on the programmatic plan amendment will also be accepted for 30 days. These two comment periods will begin the day after this legal notice publishes in the Russellville Courier, the Forest newspaper of record. These comment periods provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision by the Responsible Official, Lori Wood, Ozark-St. Francis National Forests' Supervisor.

The draft Environmental Assessment is available on-line at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55628>. The EA and supporting documentation are also available for review at the Supervisor's office in Russellville, Arkansas. Additional information can be obtained from Amy Burt at phone number (479) 964-7282 or email amy.burt@usda.gov.

How to Comment and Timeframe on the EA

The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and is subject to 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and C. Specific written comments (36 CFR 218.2) on the proposed project will be accepted for 30 days following the publication date of the legal notice in the Russellville Courier. This is the only way to calculate the comment period for the proposed action documented in the EA. Those wishing to comment should not rely on dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. If the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day.

Only individuals or entities who submit timely and specific written comments (as defined by 36 CFR 218.2) about this proposed project or activity during this or another public comment period established by the Responsible Official will be eligible to file an objection. Other requirements to be eligible to submit an objection are defined by 36 CFR 218.25 (a)(3) and include name, postal address, title of the project and signature or other verification of identity upon request and the identity of the individual or entity who authored the comments. Individual members of an entity must submit their own individual comments in order to have eligibility to object as an individual. A timely submission will be determined as outlined in 36 CFR 218.25(a)(4). It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider (36 CFR 218.2).

How to Comment and Timeframe on the Programmatic Plan Amendment

The proposed project is an activity that includes a programmatic plan amendment and is subject to 36 CFR 219 Subparts A and B. Substantive formal comments (§219.62) on the programmatic plan amendment will be accepted for 30 days following the publication date of the legal notice in the Russellville Courier. This is the only way to calculate the comment period for the programmatic plan amendment. Those wishing to comment should not rely on dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. If the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day.

Only individuals or entities (as defined by 36 CFR 219.53) who submit substantive formal comments (as defined by 36 CFR 219.62) about this plan amendment will be eligible to file an objection. Other requirements to be eligible to submit an objection are defined by 36 CFR 219.54(c) and include name, postal address, name of the plan amendment, signature or other verification of identity upon request, and the identity of the individual or entity who authored the comments. Individual members of an entity must submit their own individual comments in order to have eligibility to object as an individual. A timely submission will be determined as outlined in 36 CFR 219.16(a)(2). It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

Substantive formal comments are those that are within the scope of the proposal, are specific to the proposal, have a direct relationship to the proposal, and include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider (36 CFR 219.62).

Submitting Comments

Specific written comments on the EA and substantive formal comments on the programmatic plan amendment must be submitted via the project website, email, postal mail, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Amy Burt, 605 W. Main St, Russellville, AR 72801, or by phone at (479) 964-7282. Electronic comments including attachments may be submitted by email in word (.docx), portable document format (.pdf), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html) to comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis@usda.gov. The project website to submit comments is <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55628>. Please state "Bat Plan Amendment" in the subject line when providing electronic responses, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

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